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ABSTRACT

The newspaper program at the New Suncook School, Lovell, Maine, is a multi-level, language arts based unit designed to develop in students strong writing and interpersonal relationship skills, and to bring relevance to writing. The monthly newspaper features interviews, surveys, news, and some fiction stories written by students. The newspaper is delivered to all classrooms in the school. The prime advantage to this program is that it allows the students to generate stories for a known audience. Students, working in groups of three, write at least one story for each month's newspaper. Students write, revise, and proofread copy. Fifth graders are involved in producing the newspaper currently, but the program is easily modified for any grade level. The writing and fact-gathering time can be made part of the teacher's regular schedule. Materials needed include a computer and word processing software, a copy machine, and newspapers to serve as models. This program increases students' abilities to communicate orally and through writing. It also promotes research skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and self-esteem. (RS)

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New Suncook News

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GENERAL OVERVIEW:

The newspaper program is a multi-level, language arts based unit. It is designed to have the student develop strong writing and interpersonal relationship skills. It also brings relevancy to academics. Underlining these major goals are the minor ones of improving editing and computer skills.

In this program, students in your class will be producing a monthly newspaper for the school. This paper will feature interviews, surveys and news; as well as some fiction stories written by the class members. The paper is then delivered to all classrooms throughout the school.

A prime advantage to this program is it allows the students to generate stories for a known audience. This is a major ingredient to great writing. Knowing who is going to read the piece helps the author select the best wording and style of writing. Instead of targeting their monthly writing for the teachers, the students address their writing to their peers and younger students in the school. This helps cut back on the violent and unmotivated work that many teachers have been confronting. The students realize that they are being read by not just adults that they want to shock, but by their friends and younger brothers and sisters. This causes them to take more pride in their work and produce documents that are entertaining, insightive and wonderfully constructed.

On the first day, the students select a name for the paper through a class wide vote, providing for an impromptu lesson on democracy. The students are then given a real newspaper to look through, (I recommend an old Sunday paper.) Using this model they brainstorm a list of sections for the class paper. Sections normally include such things as comics, interviews, news, sports, art etc.

Students are then divided into groups of three. (I have found that using twos tends to lead to socializing, and fours breaks into two groups of twos.) These three select a topic or section of the paper to work on for the month. Each group webs ideas to write about concerning their topic. Each member of the group then selects one of these ideas to write an article about.

Using the writing process steps, students are given a month to produce at least one story centered on their idea. This story must fill at least one side of a sheet of writing paper. (The length can vary depending on the skill level of the writers involved.) All stories must have the following three steps: a rough draft, a second draft for teacher conference and a final draft for grading.

The rough draft shows the student's ideas and questions. It is shared with three members of the class, two from the newspaper section group, and one other member. These reviewers suggest possible changes, and grammar problems. They also review the piece for spelling. The original writer then takes his classmates suggestions and changes into consideration as he or she writes the second draft. This second draft or conference draft is stapled to the original and presented to the teacher. The teacher reviews it individually with the student, concerning grammar, ideas to help the writing be more effective, and spelling. These suggestions are written down with a red pen, by the student, as the two conference. From here, the student produces a final copy. This final copy is stapled to the other two and presented to the teacher for a grade. This method provides the teacher with an excellent mini-portfolio of a students writing ability.

Once a grade is issued, the piece is typed on the computer for publication in the class newspaper. This typing is all done by the students, not the teacher or adult volunteers. Mistakes on the final copies are corrected as the articles are typed on the computer. Each student is required to at least start typing his or her story on the computer. This way each student is exposed to some computer training, a skill that he or she will need for the rest of his or her life.

When all the stories have been typed, the pages are printed out and proof read by the entire class. This is done by having the students read a page, sign the back and hand it to someone whose name is not on the back. When the proof reading is done, the students make any additional corrections on the computer so that a final set of pages can be generated. This final set of pages is photocopied for each member of the class, the principal, and at least one copy for each of the classes in the school.

STUDENTS:

Currently this program is being done by fifth grade students, but it could be easily modified for any grade level. This can be done by adjusting the requirements to the goals of what ever level writers you are working with. The program also includes special education students.

The program has been successfully conducted at New Suncook School for the past four years. This school operates under the inclusionary model and therefore special education students are in the regular classroom all the time. Modifications to the program requirements are made in consultation with the Special Education Teacher to meet their individual needs without removing them from participation.

GOALS:

This program's chief goal is to improve the student's writing ability through use of both fiction and non-fiction writing.

Student's also develop their editing skills through both critiquing their fellow writer's work orally and by proofing their own work during the writing process.

Social or interpersonal relationship skills are developed through contact with fellow students, teachers and other staff members of the school. Students establish

acceptable behavior skills through interviewing adults and students, observing classes, and interacting in a business like manner with each other.

Computer skills are also improved or established through direct hands-on work with a keyboard and software.

Above all, the program brings a relevancy to writing. Students learn to appreciate their writing and having others read it. They realize the importance of going through the various writing stages to produce a final copy that others will enjoy and compliment them about. Students take with them a reason for writing, and an understanding of how to write for a given audience.

TIME:

The time commitment to the program is not as great as you may think. The writing and fact gathering time is all part of my schedule. Students are responsible to contact people before or after school concerning time they can interview or witness events. Students then leave as intrusively as possible from the regular class time to make these appointments. They then must be working on their stories during my scheduled one hour of writing each day. (I schedule this time as the last hour of the day.) If a student is done with their story for the month, they are then working on proofing others, typing on the computer, or correcting the computer printouts.

Individual conferences with the writers take about two to five minutes each depending on the students. These can be easily accomplished during that hour of writing time. Remember that not all your rough drafts will be turned in at once. Nightly I read through the work turned in to me, so that the next day I can conference with the writers, this way the conferences do not build up to the point where they can not be completed each day.

MATERIALS:

The program needs **imagination**. You need to be able to stretch what might be seen in a paper to fit the writing ability of your students. The paper is really more of a showcase for their writing than an actual what's going on at your school paper.

Extremely important is also a willingness by the rest of the school staff to allow reporters into their classrooms.

A computer and some sort of word processing software. I am currently using an old Apple 2E so just about any computer you can get your hands on can serve. The idea is to have the students using the keyboard and basic computer commands. There is no need to have to use the latest in technology. As far as software, I am using Children's Writing and Publishing Center software. Similar software is available for about $100.

A copy machine, or mimeograph machine, if your printer can produce stencils.

A newspaper to serve as a model.

CONCLUSION:

This program increases a student's ability to communicate both orally and through writing. It also promotes research skills, interpersonal relationship skills, and finally self-esteem. There is nothing more exciting than seeing the face of one of my students being told by someone in the school that they enjoyed reading their story in the latest issue of the paper.